NEW COURSE PROPOSAL
Dave Gentry-Akin
dgentry@stmarys-ca.edu

1. School: School of Liberal Arts
   Department: Theology and Religious Studies
   Course Number and Title:

   TRS 127
   In the Face of Mystery:
   Faith and Reason in the Search for God

1a. Prerequisites: TRS 097: The Bible and Its Interpretation is a prerequisite for this course.

1b. In-Depth Study: This course builds on the initial foundation laid in TRS 097 by inviting students into a deeper exploration of the nature of faith and reason and how each functions as a “way of knowing” which, when taken together, can bring us to a deeper understanding of reality than either faith or reason taken alone.

1c. Intellectual Rigor: Students in the course typically read and discuss two or three challenging texts that are often read and studied by graduate students and professional theologians and ministers in the Church. Because the course deals with the very possibility of coming to a knowledge of the divine it is by its very nature a complex topic best explored in an upper division course. Students in the course write four reflection papers, one lengthy book report, and an in-depth research paper on a philosopher or a theologian who has made an important contribution to the topic.

1d. Higher Order Cognitive and Affective Skills: As the learning outcomes document, the course requires the exercise of cognitive and affective skills at an advanced level.

2. Justification for the Course: This course fills an important lacuna in the course offerings of the systematics section of the TRS department. As the Mission Statement of the College eloquently states, Saint Mary’s College exists to “affirm and foster the Christian understanding of the human person which animates the educational mission of the Catholic Church”. Further, the Mission Statement tells us,“the intellectual and spiritual journeys of the human person are inextricably connected”. As Blessed Pope John Paul II writes in his encyclical, Fides et Ratio, “Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth—in a word, to know Godself—so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves.” This course seeks to help students explore faith and reason as two “ways of knowing”, two sources which mutually inform and correct one another in our search for the truth, in our search for God.

2a. Objectives, or Learning Outcomes, of the Course (drawn entirely from the syllabus):

At the end of this course, students will be able to:

- define the term “theology” as understood in the Roman Catholic context.
• identify the key sources of theology in Roman Catholicism (the Bible, the Fathers of the Church, the teachings of ecumenical councils and popes, the writings of theologians), and describe the importance of each.
• differentiate between “faith” and “reason”, as understood in Catholic Thought, and explain why each is understood to be a valid “way of knowing”, a way of approaching “Truth”.
• explain why philosophy is regarded as such an important source in Catholic theology.
• explain the concept of “Revelation” as understood in Catholic thought.
• compare and contrast “Scripture” and “Tradition” as sources of Revelation.
• explain what is meant by the term “the Wisdom Literature” and expound on the notion of a sapiential approach to knowledge and learning.
• explain what is meant by the human person
• define all important philosophical and theological terms used in the course.
• Compare and contrast philosophy of religion to dogmatic or systematic theology.
• List and define three contemporary approaches to the “God Question”
• distinguish among various classical ways of conceiving of God, e.g. Deism, Theism, Panentheism, and assess the strengths and limitations of each model.
• explain what Christians mean when they refer to Christ as “the Word of God”

2b. How the Objectives relate to Department, School, or College Goals: This area has been covered in Number 2 above, “Justification for the Course”.

2c. Assignments: Students take biweekly objective quizzes on the assigned readings, lectures, and classroom discussions of the course. They write four reflection papers in response to short, profound primary texts that correlate with the themes and ideas covered in the readings and lectures of the course. Because most students are taking the course to fulfill the TRS requirement in the Core Curriculum, the pass/fail grading option is excluded by College policy.

3. Student Population: While a few majors may occasionally take this course, the overwhelming majority of the students will come from a cross-section of schools and majors and are taking the course to fulfill the core curriculum requirements of the College. The course will be offered every year or two. One or two sections will be taught in single term. 25 students are enrolled in each section.

4. Relationship to the College Curriculum: As noted under Number 2 above, this course fills a lacuna in the current offerings of the systematics section of the Theology and Religious Studies offerings in the Catalog. No other courses will require modification or deletion as a result of the introduction of this new course. Because this course bridges the fields of philosophy and theology, it supports the learning outcomes of the Philosophy Department, especially this outcome: “An ability to pose to oneself the questions raised by the claims of the Christian faith on one’s own ethical and metaphysical reasoning.”

5. Extraordinary Implementation Costs: None


7. Course Credit and Grading Options: SMC course credits: 1. Total number of hours of instruction: 95 minutes x 2 meetings per week x 14 weeks of the term: 2660 minutes, or 44.33
hours. **Out of Class Time:** approximately 6 hours per week, with more time needed around the times that major exams or assignments are due. **Course Format:** lecture/discussion.

8. **Prerequisites:** Covered under 1a above. This course requires TRS 097: *The Bible and Its Interpretation* as a prerequisite.

9. **Course Description Wording:**

In the Catholic tradition, following Saint Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109), we understand theology as *fides quarens intellectum*, or “faith seeking understanding”. Thus, faith and reason are, for the Catholic intellectual, integrally related as two sources for coming to know about God. As Blessed Pope John Paul II writes in his encyclical, *Fides et Ratio*, “Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth; and God has placed in the human heart a desire to know the truth—in a word, to know Godself—so that, by knowing and loving God, men and women may also come to the fullness of truth about themselves.”

10. **Course Content:**

See attached syllabus from the last experimental teaching of the course.

11. **Experimental Course Offering:**

Two sections of this course were taught in Fall 2013 using the attached syllabus. The students generally responded very enthusiastically to the course material, although the instructor realized, early on, that the students had to assimilate the material much more slowly than he had initially anticipated. Therefore, course topics and assignments had to be recalibrated according to the principle of “less is more”, i.e., we covered less material than the instructor had anticipated, but we covered it in considerable depth.